



Occupational Safety and Health Program

Newsletter

September 2002

Is Your Office Prepared?

Recent events have underscored the importance of rapid and effective medical emergency response. An employee may become sick or injured while at work.



Prompt, properly administered first aid care can mean the difference between life and death, rapid versus prolonged recovery and temporary versus permanent disability. Employees and supervisors must know the procedures to follow if a medical emergency occurs at their facility.

For some facilities, immediate medical services may not be available. In those cases, an employee or employees must be trained to administer first aid. When reviewing your emergency response plan, consider:

- o Location and availability of medical facilities or emergency services, including response time for external services;
- o Accessibility of medical personnel to consult on occupational health issues;
- o Types of accidents that could reasonably occur in the workplace;
- o Number and location of employees at the facility;
- o Bloodborne pathogen requirements;
- o The level of first aid training employees should receive and which employees should be trained; and
- o The first aid supplies that should be available.

Tips to Reduce Stress at Your Workstation

Most computer users report some kind of physical problem. Arranging your workstation can reduce muscle stress and prevent potential problems.

PREVENT GLARE

Screen glare can cause eye strain and headaches. To prevent glare the work station should be arranged so that the operator does not face an unshielded window or a bright light source. The orientation of the video screen should be perpendicular or nearly perpendicular to the line of windows.

Place the monitor directly in front of you at a distance of 18-30 inches. You should look down to view the screen at an angle of 5-20 degrees. As a general rule, the top of the screen should be no higher than eye level. This will reduce strain on your eyes, neck, shoulders and back.

ADJUST CHAIR AND KEYBOARD

A properly adjusted chair allows the operator to place both feet firmly on the floor when seated comfortably. If your feet cannot be placed flat on the floor when seated, a footrest may be useful.

Maintain proper body posture by keeping your wrist in a neutral position (not bent upwards or downwards), your elbows bent at approximately 90 degree angles comfortably at your sides, your lower back supported by the chair, your thighs parallel to the floor, and your knees bent at approximately 90 degree angles.

Prevent compression of the wrist and hands. Hands and fingers should be relaxed while keying. There are an assortment of padded mouse and key pads available. These accessories will help you avoid placing your wrists on a hard surface, maintain a neutral hand position, and reduce strain.

TAKE BREAKS

Alternate your activities. You should take a 5-10 minute break from the computer for every hour of continuous typing. The break is time away from the computer. You can continue to perform other work, such as filing or paperwork, in lieu of typing. Breaks help relieve muscle tension and reduce stress.

Department News

The Department's Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Program is hosting a Safety Leadership workshop on October 15-16 for the Commerce Safety Council. The workshop will focus on the executive role in safety management, including:

- Vision and Commitment
- Accountability
- Leadership and Participation
- Integration of Safety in Business Planning

In addition, we are near completion on a Senior Executive Service training module on safety awareness and hope to have the module ready for demonstration at the next Safety Council meeting.

Bureau News

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) held a 3-day Safety Conference for safety and environmental personnel. The sessions covered a wide range of subjects, including safety and environmental assessments, development of the NOAA Environmental Management System, and proposed changes to the safety programs. The conference culminated with an awards ceremony attended by senior NOAA staff.

NOAA completed a safety inspection initiative with nearly 100% all facilities inspected. The data from the inspections will be analyzed to provide recommendations to management. One outcome noted so far is the need to implement an ergonomics

program. A full analysis of all the inspections will be completed in September.

At the Bureau of the Census, a new specialist, George Barnett, was hired in the Safety Office. George transferred from another branch within the Human Resources Division and has previous safety experience from his past jobs in State government.

A business plan was developed regarding a proposal to install modular units at the Suitland Federal Center for screening all incoming mail. The Safety Office is meeting regularly with mail room operations and security managers to work out the details.

The emergency evacuation procedures were updated in Building 2 of the Suitland Federal Center. The new procedures provide for safer evacuations with less confusion. The Safety Office trained the Division Safety Representatives within Building 2 on the new procedures, and is currently working on updating the rest of the buildings on the Suitland Federal Center to include the new procedures.

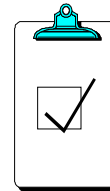
At the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Dr. Deborah L. Grubbe, DuPont Corporate Director for Safety and Health, spoke to the NIST staff about DuPont's Commitment to Safety.

NIST Senior Managers were also trained by DuPont on safety management techniques.

All of these initiatives are welcome enhancements to our safety and health program and will work towards our goal of providing a safer workplace and eliminating injuries. We appreciate the efforts of the Commerce employees who participated in the development of these initiatives.

Safety Survey

We received over 30 responses through the Safety Survey Web Site for the month of August. The responses include suggestions to improve the safety program, as well as concerns regarding workplace conditions.



We are working to ensure all of the suggestions and concerns are addressed. Here are some of the questions and comments we received:

“What is the official procedure and paperwork to report suspected safety violations? What do you do if management does not respond to complaints or reprimands employees for filing complaints ??”

All Department of Commerce (DOC) employees are encouraged to verbally report unsafe or unhealthful working conditions to their immediate supervisor who must promptly investigate the situation and take appropriate actions.

However, any DOC employee may submit a written report of an unsafe or unhealthful working condition directly to the Area Safety Representative, Regional Safety Manager, or the Operating Unit Safety and Health Representative. Form CD-351 should be used for that purpose. The form is available through the OSH Program Web Site or at:

<http://www.osec.doc.gov/forms/direct.htm>

If Form CD-351 is not readily available, a legible report containing the following information may be submitted.

1. Reason for report: safety or health hazard.
2. Your duty station.
3. Specific location of unsafe or unhealthful condition; (e.g., address, building number, room, etc.).
4. Description of the hazard.
5. Action taken by the responsible supervisor to correct hazard (if known).
6. Employees who wish to remain anonymous shall so indicate on the written report.

When a serious condition exists, immediate action must be taken. That action may include posting a sign, blocking off an area to prevent access, or similar measure.

Additional guidance is provided in the Commerce Occupational Safety and Health Manual. The manual can be accessed through the OSH Web Site at:

<http://ohrm.doc.gov/safetyprogram/safety.htm>

Employees who report safety hazards are protected from reprisal, restraint, coercion, or discrimination under Section 19 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Executive Order 12196, and 29 Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart G.

“At NIST Safety seems to have become a high-priority item. I guess that's a good thing. The only concern I have is that this issue is the ONLY thing that seems to be high priority at the current time. What about issues related to the real work we do?”

The Commerce OSH Program is extremely glad to hear that safety has become a high priority at NIST. We believe that the safety and health of all Commerce employees is our first priority. No job should be performed unless it can be performed safely. As employees and managers become familiar with safety principles, safety planning can be integrated seamlessly into work activities. We all recognize the importance of the work performed at NIST and the other bureaus. We also know that productivity, success and safety all go together.

“It seems just fine overall. I'm certainly in favor of a safe work place, but I wonder why this is suddenly a major cause even in areas that are exclusively an office environment.”

Commerce had over 2000 reported injuries and illnesses over the last three years. Approximately, 600 of those occurred in offices. They included broken arms and legs, lacerations, back injuries, and a host of other injuries. In addition to the human toll, workplace injuries cost Commerce over \$15 million in workers' compensation yearly. We would ask, how many injuries and at what cost should we be willing to accept?

“How can an employee be protected from retaliation if the employee refuses to perform a task deemed unsafe?”

As indicated previously, employees are protected under Section 19 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Executive Order 12196, the 29 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR), Subpart G. Subpart G further states that employees have the right to “decline to perform his or her assigned task because of a reasonable belief that, under the circumstances the task poses an imminent risk of death or serious bodily harm coupled with a reasonable belief that there is insufficient time to seek effective redress through normal hazard reporting and abatement procedures established in accordance with this part.”

More information on Subpart G and other OSHA regulations are available at the OSHA Web Site at:

http://www.osha.gov/comp_links.html

Employees continue to voice concerns regarding security conditions. Those comments were forwarded to the Office of Security for response. In addition, many concerns regarding safety at Commerce facilities were reported. Commerce Safety Offices are working to resolve those issues.

The Department of Commerce is working to establish a responsive, performance-oriented Occupational Safety and Health Program. If you have any concerns or require assistance, please call 202-482-4738 or 202-482-0211.